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ABSTRACT

A modified form of Blumberg's interaction analysis is presented for supervisors to use in self-evaluation of the supervisor-teacher conferences. Supervisors tape record their conferences, then analyze and make changes in their verbal behavior where needed. The modifications make the method easier to use and interpret. Ten categories are listed in one column, grouped into supporting, asking, and telling behaviors. Examples are given in a second column, and probable impact in a third column. The categories are arranged in a continuum from indirect to direct influence and are transferred to a matrix where they are clustered by categories. The completed matrix provides valuable information about the supervisor-teacher conference and makes it easier to find out if the teachers heard what the supervisors thought they said. A table of the modified system and an example of the matrix are included in the paper. (MD)

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ANALYZING SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES: DID YOU HEAR WHAT I THINK I SAID?

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ANALYZING SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES

Abstract

Arthur Blumberg's system for analyzing supervisor-teacher conferences was modified to provide more data for persons in supervisory positions who wish to improve their skills in conducting conferences. The categories were defined, grouped, and rearranged so that they can be learned easily. The new arrangement places them on a continuum from indirect to direct influence and allows them to be clustered when the coded tallies are transferred to a matrix. The impact of each category, the unspoken message, was also described.

ANALYZING SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES:
DID YOU HEAR WHAT I THINK I SAID?

Conducting supervisory conferences requires special skills if the conferences are to be productive. The principal or supervisor must know how to begin a conference, how to set the climate, how and when to get to the point, how to ask pertinent questions, how to engage the teacher in problem solving, how to give feedback, and how to end the conference. Intuition rather than professional competence is the chief source of knowledge for many principals and supervisors. As a result, while some conferences turn out very well, others are unsatisfactory. Principals, supervisors and teachers alike are dissatisfied with the outcomes of many conferences but are confused about why.

This situation doesn't have to exist. Intuition can be supported with quantitative data and conference skills improved if supervisors and principals learn to analyze their conferences using a modified form of Blumberg's (1980) interaction analysis. This fifteen category system was developed by combining the problem solving categories of the Bales (1951) system for coding group process with categories from the Flanders (1970) system for analyzing classroom interaction. The system and Blumberg's reasons for creating it are explained in his book, Supervisors and Teacher: A Private Cold War. To use this method for self evaluation, supervisors tape record their conferences with teachers, analyze the results and make changes in their verbal behavior as desired.

Modifications of the Blumberg system make it easier to use and to interpret. Sam Leles (1976) rearranged the supervisory categories to provide more data when the coded numbers were transferred to a matrix. I have grouped and defined the categories so that they can be learned quickly and have added a description of the influence of each category. These modifications will be introduced in this article.

The original Blumberg System

Because Blumberg thought supervisors rather than teachers were primarily responsible for improving communication, as they had the most control and influence in their conferences, he assigned ten categories to supervisory talk and four categories to teacher talk. One category is used to represent silence or when both people talk at once. The original Blumberg system is as follows:

Supervisor Behavior

Category 1. Support-inducing communications behavior
Category 2. Praise
Category 3. Accepts or uses teacher's ideas
Category 4. Asks for information
Category 5. Giving information
Category 6. Asks for opinions
Category 7. Asks for suggestions
Category 8. Gives opinions
Category 9. Gives suggestions
Category 10. Criticism

Category 11. Asks for information, opinions, or suggestions

Category 12. Gives information, opinions, or suggestions

Category 13. Positive social emotional behavior

Category 14. Negative social emotional behavior

Category 15. Silence or confusion

The modified Blumberg system

The modified system is shown in Figure 1. Each category is described briefly in the first column, examples are given in the second column and the probable impact in the third column. The information on probable impact was obtained from discussions following simulated conferences. A rearrangement of the supervisory categories allows them to be grouped easily into supporting, asking, and telling, behaviors. The categories for the teacher's verbal behavior have been rearranged also to conform with the arrangement of the supervisor's categories. Thus persons learning the system have a framework of support, ask, and tell that permits them to grasp the concept more easily.

INSERT TABLE 1

The first two groups of supervisory behavior contain three categories each; the third group has four categories. The new arrangement places the categories on a continuum from indirect influence to direct influence. As a general rule, behaviors toward

the indirect end of the continuum tend to increase the teacher's autonomy. Therefore, as the category numbers increase, the amount of direct control the supervisor uses increases. For this reason the lowered numbered categories are said to produce a warmer climate than categories with higher numbers. For example, a supervisor who asks a teacher to suggest alternative solutions to a problem (Category 4, Asking for Suggestions) is seen as demonstrating more trust in the teacher's judgment than one who tells the teacher what to do about the problem (Category 9, Giving Suggestions). This is not to say that one end of the continuum is "better" than the other. The appropriate use of direct and indirect behaviors depends on the situation and involves many factors, including the purpose of the conference and the existing relationship between the participants.

Indirect influence: The supporting categories

At the end of the indirect/direct continuum is Category 1, Emotional Support. This verbal behavior resembles the interpersonal skill described as "reflective listening: (Bolton, 1979). The supervisor nonjudgmentally indicates an awareness of the teacher's feelings and in doing so demonstrates empathy. The use of Category 1 exerts a very subtle influence, as does Category 3, Accepting Ideas. Behavior in Category 3 is similar to Bolton's "paraphrasing." The distinction between Category 1 and Category 3 is that Category 1 recognizes emotions and Category 3 acknowledges the content of the teacher's remarks. In using these behaviors the supervisor demonstrates an effort to view the situation

from the teacher's point of view. Both categories contribute to a supportive conference climate as their use encourages the teacher to continue talking and to explore a problem in depth. They are normal behaviors found in conversations between friends when each is trying to understand and clarify what the other is saying. The description of "acting listening" popularized by Gordon (1977) contains some elements of both categories.

The other behavior in the supporting group is one which people most easily recognize: Category 2, Approval. Flanders and Blumberg label this category "praise." It includes supervisory remarks expressing positive affect toward the teacher or the teacher's behavior. Acceptance of the teacher's ideas (Category 3) actually may be more indirect than the approval registered in Category 2, but the order of the first three categories was left as originally arranged by Flanders for the benefit of persons already familiar with that system.

Indirect influence: The asking categories

The categories describing types of questions are arranged in order of indirectness also. Asking the teacher for suggestions (Category 4) implies that the supervisor thinks the teacher has something worthwhile to contribute. Likewise, asking for the teacher's opinion (Category 5) conveys a respect for the teacher's perception. Both types are open ended and contribute to a warm climate in that they convey regard, a necessary ingredient in healthy interpersonal relationships. Asking for information

(Category 6) is placed in the middle of the continuum because this type of question may be direct or indirect. How it is heard depends on the situation. Blumberg noted that if teachers feel insecure they may be threatened by such questions and view the supervisor's search for information as a trap. However, if the supervisor first establishes a climate of support and acceptance, the use of Category 6 simply tells the teacher that the supervisor is trying to obtain the facts.

Direct influence: The telling categories

The remaining categories at the other half of the continuum continue in order of their direct influence. Giving factual information (Category 7) to the teacher is seen as less direct than expressing an opinion; giving an opinion (Category 8) is less direct than telling the teacher what to do; and giving directions or suggestions (Category 9) is less direct than criticizing the teacher's behavior (Category 10).

The direct behaviors are found in varying amounts in different types of supervisory conferences. For example, in the post observation conferences of the clinical supervision cycle, Category 7 (Giving Information) would be found in abundance as the supervisor reported the data collected. In a collaborative problem solving conference the supervisor's opinions (Category 8) and suggestions (Category 9) would be interspersed with the teacher's suggestions (Category 13) as both brainstormed alternative solutions. A conference with a beginning teacher might contain a sizable number of directions (Category 9) as the supervisor explained how to do expected precedures. The purpose of the

conference would suggest which categories would be most appropriate.

Using the modified Blumberg system

The method of coding the tapes and transferring the coded tallies to a matrix is similar to the method devised by Flanders and is explained in detail in Blumberg's book. Developing the matrix may be done with a computer program.

Because the behavior in the conference is coded according to the perception of the message receiver rather than what the message sender intended, supervisors may become more sensitive to differences in perception as they attempt to hear what the teacher heard. This awareness can be increased if supervisors compare their perceptions of the verbal behaviors in the conference with another listener to the tapes, perhaps the teacher involved.

A completed matrix provides valuable information about the conference but requires some practice and skill in learning to interpret the data. If the supervisor was not satisfied with the outcome of a conference, the matrix can provide data that may help to explain why. Conversely, if a conference was successful, a look at the matrix can give clues to the reason for its success.

As shown in Figure 1 the revised arrangement of the categories makes it possible for areas of the matrix to show clusters of direct and indirect categories. A quick look at these areas will tell the supervisor about the use of verbal behavior that may increase or decrease the teacher's autonomy and indicate the

INSERT FIGURE 1

type of direct/indirect control that was dominant in the conference. When this information is combined with percentage and ratio data, supervisors can obtain a better understanding of their conference behavior and plan to practice those skills needed to improve communication. They can learn what they normally say to find out the teacher's viewpoint (the asking categories), what they say to indicate they are trying to understand the teacher's point of view (the supporting categories), what they say to tell the teacher the view from the supervisor's side (the telling categories), and how teachers react to their remarks. Intuition now has supportive data. The Leles-Toppins modifications of the Blumberg system make it easier to find out if teachers heard what supervisors thought they said.

Table 1

Modification of Blumberg's System

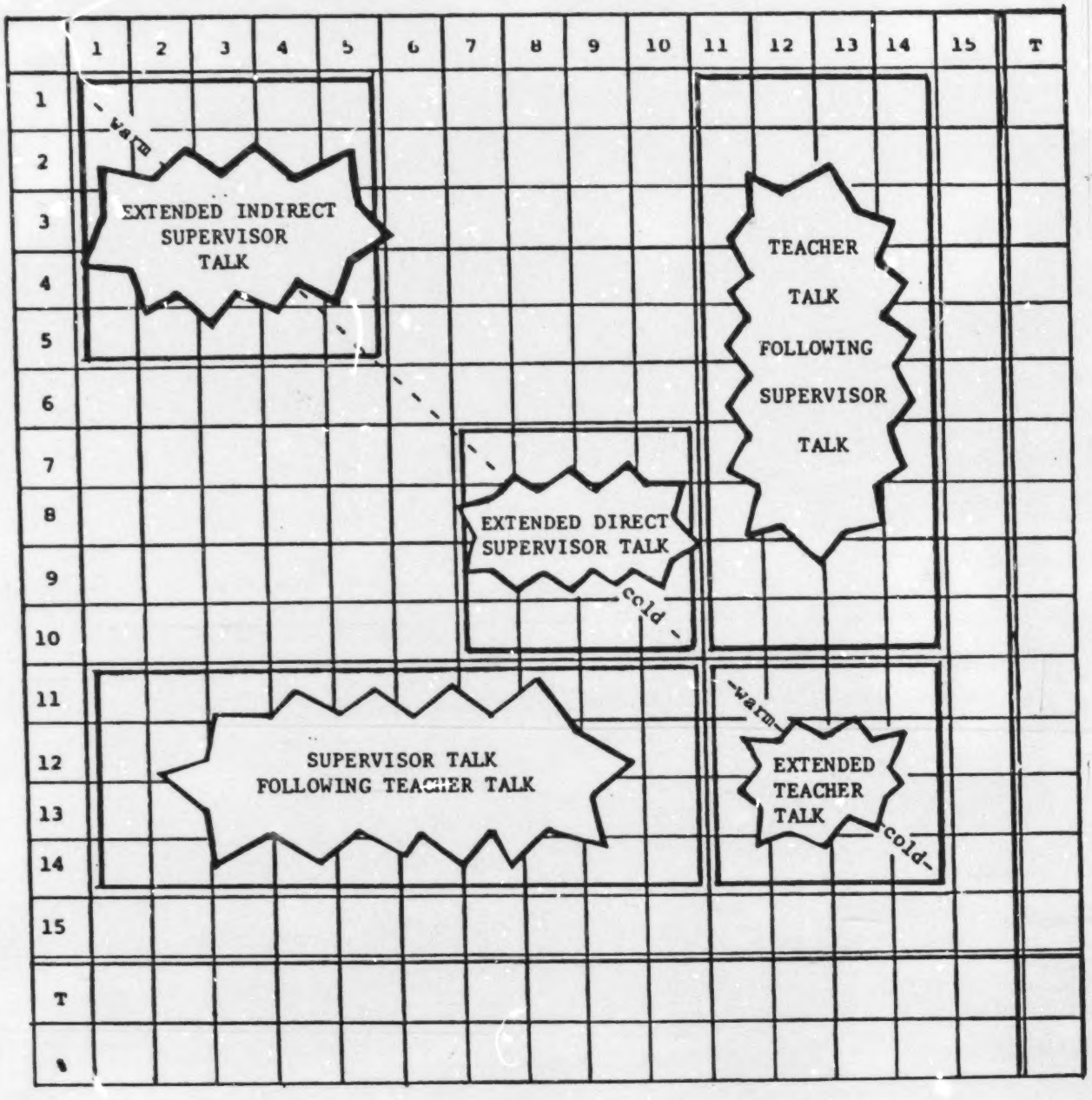
	Supervisor's Categories	Examples	Unspoken Message
SUPPORTING	1 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT. Accepting feelings.	"Sounds like you're discouraged."	"It's o.k. to feel that way."
	2 APPROVAL. Positive value statements.	"I liked the way you used cartoons in the math lesson."	"You're a person of worth."
ACCEPTING	3 ACCEPTING IDEAS. Clarification of teacher's ideas.	"You're saying that you think Pat needs more structure."	"Your thoughts are valuable."
ASKING	4 ASKING FOR SUGGESTIONS. Seeking alternatives.	"What approaches can you think of?	"I'd like your ideas."
	5 ASKING FOR OPINIONS. Seeking assessment.	"How do you think the students will react?"	"I value your viewpoint."
	6 ASKING FOR INFORMATION. Seeking factual data.	"How many students are in your class?"	"I don't have the facts."
TELLING	7 GIVING INFORMATION. Providing objective facts.	"Five students were at the computer desk."	"Here's the data without evaluation."
	8 GIVING OPINIONS. Expressing beliefs, judgments, feelings.	"Every student should learn to draw."	"I view the situation this way."
	9 GIVING SUGGESTIONS. Offering ideas, giving directions.	"You might try group projects with those students."	"Here are some possibilities."
	10 CRITICISM. Negative, defensive, or hostile behavior.	"Your class is too noisy.	"I have a negative reaction."

Teacher's Categories	
11 SUPPORTING.	Capsule of Supervisory Categories 1, 2, 3.
12 ASKING.	Capsule of Supervisory Categories 3, 4, 5.
13 TELLING.	Capsule of Supervisory Categories 6, 7, 8.
14 CRITICISM.	Same as Supervisory Category 10.

15 SILENCE. When no one is speaking or when talk is indistinct.

Figure 1

Matrix Showing Clusters of Verbal Categories


1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 T
warm
EXTENDED INDIRECT SUPERVISOR TALK
TEACHER TALK FOLLOWING SUPERVISOR TALK
EXTENDED DIRECT SUPERVISOR TALK
cold
SUPERVISOR TALK FOLLOWING TEACHER TALK
warm
EXTENDED TEACHER TALK
cold

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